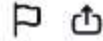




## Chapter 82



[POV Amen]

Something has changed since dawn, a subtle shift in the texture of reality itself.

At first, I thought it was the stabilizing ritual with Meritaten last night. The desperate one we performed in the Chamber of Rebirth this time.

Waking up this morning, I had felt strength return to my limbs. My hands had stopped trembling, the persistent headaches had receded, and I even dared to hope that perhaps we had found a way to counter Seth's corruption.

To free Neferet and remain our happiness together once again.

But this... this is different.

This is not the familiar warmth of divine restoration but something colder, more foreign – like watching storm clouds gather on a day that should be clear.

Servants scurry like frightened mice, averting their eyes as I pass. Guards stand rigid at their posts, sweat beading beneath bronze helmets despite the cool evening breeze.

They feel it too.

My sandals slap against marble as I stride through familiar halls that suddenly seem wrong. The fragment of Osiris within me pulses with anxiety, an ancient warning I cannot fully decipher.

All I know with certainty is that I must find Neferet.

She wasn't in my chambers when I came back last night, neither was she in her old one. Nor in the temple gardens where she often sought solitude. Not in the royal baths or the library or any of our secret meeting places.

With each empty space, dread coils tighter in my chest.

"Have you seen Lady Neferet?" I demand of a passing servant.

The girl flinches as if struck. "No, Divine One." Her voice trembles. "Not since..."

Her eyes darted to the floor, secrets heavy on her tongue.

"Since when?" I press, stepping closer.

"Since she..." The girl swallows. "Since what happened with Wercl, Your Majesty."

My blood runs cold at this mention and the servant's face pales as she spoke again,

"I mean... They say Lady Neferet... have changed. Her eyes turned strange. She spoke with another voice and..."

She shakes her head, unwilling to continue and I dismiss her with a sharp gesture, my mind racing.

A strange pull, almost mystical in nature, draws me toward the throne room. The massive cedar doors stand partly open, spilling amber light across the antechamber floor.

No guards flank the entrance. No servants busy themselves within. The silence is absolute, disturbed only by the hammering of my heart against my ribs.

I enter, and the blood freezes in my veins.

Neferet lounges upon my throne, but everything about her is wrong. Her normally perfect posture is languid and unfamiliar, one leg draped carelessly over the armrest.

Her fingers, once gentle in their touch, now tap impatiently against gilded wood. And her eyes, those beautiful emerald pools I have lost myself in countless times, now gleam with malevolent crimson light.

Between those slender fingers dangles the sacred relic of Osiris, a crescent amulet that should be secured in the innermost sanctum of the temple.

She toys with it absently, as though it were a forgotten trinket rather than one of Egypt's most sacred treasures.

*"Looking for someone, Osiris' boy?"* she asks, her voice carrying dual tones – her melodic timbre undercut with a guttural resonance that sends shivers down my spine.

I take a cautious step forward, hand instinctively moving to the dagger at my belt. "Neferet?"

A smile spreads across her familiar face – a terrible, foreign expression that transforms her beauty into something sinister.

*"I'm afraid Neferet isn't available anymore,"* the thing wearing her skin replies, the voice an unsettling blend of hers and something ancient, masculine, powerful.

My jaw tightens. I plant my feet firmly on the ground, refusing to show fear despite the rapid beating of my heart.

"I don't believe you. She's still fighting. I know she is!"

Seth laughs, the sound chilling from Neferet's throat. Rising from the throne with inhuman grace, she – or rather, the god using her body – approaches me with predatory intent.

Each step carries the fluid menace of a cobra preparing to strike.

*"I broke her spirit with a simple truth,"* Seth explains, clearly enjoying my horror. *"I revealed that even your love, the one thing she believed was truly hers, was simply my creation all along. Every emotion was amplified by my influence."*

He steps closer, using Neferet's finger to trace my jawline. The touch burns like ice against my skin.

*"After all, she had nothing left to fight for."*

"Liar." I jerk away, my expression hardening with fury. "Our love was real. It *is* real. Whatever manipulation you attempted, you couldn't fabricate what exists between us!"

Something flickers in Neferet's crimson eyes, uncertainty, perhaps, or irritation. The momentary lapse fuels a desperate hope within me.

She's still there. Still fighting.

*"Believe what you wish,"* Seth dismisses with a wave of her hand. *"It changes nothing anyway. The vessel is mine now. Completely and irrevocably."*

He laughs, a sound so unlike Neferet's gentle, melodic laughter that it pierces my heart like a spear.

*"She's here, somewhere."* He taps her temple with a slender finger.

*"Watching. Screaming. Quite tiresome, really."*

"What have you done to her, Seth?" I demand, finding my voice at last.

"Done?" He raised her brow. *"I've honored her. Not every mortal gets to host a god."*

He circles the throne room, trailing fingers along pillars and wall carvings.

Where her hand touches, thin layers of sand appear, as if the stone itself is transforming at her command. The scent of the deep desert fills the chamber.

*"Did you think I would remain banished forever?"* he continues, voice dropping to a dangerous purr. *"That I would accept defeat while Osiris's lineage rules what should be mine?"*

Her hands weave patterns in the air, and the sand gathering around her forms into miniature soldiers, beasts, and scenes of battle.

I watch in horror as tiny cities crumble, temples collapse, and people flee before monsters born of nightmare.

*"The red desert will reclaim the black waters,"* she promises, amber light flaring in her eyes. *"I will unmake all that Osiris built. Starting with you, little fragment-bearer."*

The miniature sandstorm swirls faster, images blurring together in a terrible prophecy: my people scattered, the Nile choked with bodies, temples reduced to dust.

*"Did you really think your little romance could outmaneuver divine destiny?"* he mocks. *"Love?"*

He spits the word as if it tastes foul on her tongue.

he spits the words as if it tastes foul on her tongue.

*"A weakness I will exploit to bring Egypt to its knees."*

I stand motionless, trapped between fury and despair. My fingers itch to draw my sword, to charge forward and strike the god inhabiting my beloved's body.

But it is still Neferet's body.

Still her face, her hands, her lips, even as they curl into Seth's cruel smile.

"I will find a way to free her," I vow, each word weighted with royal authority.

*"You won't,"* Seth replies with casual certainty. *"But your attempts will be amusing to watch, indeed."*

She returns to the throne, settling into it with possessive satisfaction. Her crimson eyes gleam with malicious amusement, and when he speaks again, it is with the cold finality of a death sentence.

*"You better prepare for the war, young Pharaoh. The Nile waters will run red before my throne rises from the ashes of your reign."*

## End of The Chapter

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Comments

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Gifts

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